

(A. and B.) Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning. My name is Adriane Powell and I am representing Crossroads of Michigan, a social services ministry with offices in the Cass Corridor area and eastside of Detroit. I am here in support of the Michigan Prisoner Re-entry Initiative and legislation that assists those recently released from prison obtaining Michigan identification. I believe our city and state will be stronger if we provide those recently released from prison tools for success upon their release. Having a valid Michigan ID is one of the most important tools a person can have as a contributing member of society and unfortunately is something that many who are recently released are having difficulty obtaining.

(C.) Need for Identification

At Crossroads, we are very familiar with the challenges facing ex-offenders. Identification is, of course, not the only challenge but many other barriers are exacerbated by a lack of proper ID. We estimate that in one year's time, at Crossroads' two offices, we see an average of 1,000 clients who are requesting assistance directly related to their ex-offender status. Recent statistics gives us good reason to believe that this number has the potential to significantly increase in the near future. In a report by the National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices, statistics on the current prison population support what I see each day in Detroit. Most prisoners have a history of substance abuse, have dropped out of high school and have an unstable housing situation. Many have a diagnosed mental illness and many are living with HIV, AIDS or hepatitis C. We know that as this population is released, government and private resources become strained. It is in the best interest of our state to prevent released prisoners from falling

back into old pattern. The high cost of crime can be alleviated with preventative re-entry programs.

Regardless of any other disadvantage a released prisoner may be bringing with him or her back to society, the most significant need of the ex-offenders we see is obtaining a valid Michigan state ID. A person must gather together the necessary documents and also provide the funds for the ID and possibly other documents. This process can be expensive, frustrating and time-consuming.

The need for proper identification upon release from prison is vital. A valid id is required almost anywhere a person turns, from employment, housing, medical assistance, Department of Human Services and other social service resources, check cashing, and generally identifying yourself. There is almost no legitimate way to take care of yourself and conduct your business without a valid state ID. Having an ex-offender status already puts someone at a disadvantage when applying for employment but without a valid ID, it is nearly impossible. Reducing the barriers to obtaining the needed id will help ex-offenders and our state.

(D.) Barriers to Identification

The process to obtain valid Michigan ID for many who are recently released from prison is full of barriers and challenges.

Making prisoners aware of what documents will be required and assisting them in obtaining them before release will hasten their transition process. Many documents, such as birth certificate, school records, or other documents held by friends or family could be obtained while still incarcerated, by mail. Many clients we see at Crossroads do not have any documents when they are released. Ex-offender clients come to one of our two

offices in Detroit in need of help acquiring Michigan State ID cards. Although they may be in possession of a Michigan Department of Corrections ID Card, the Secretary of State requires two additional documents before they will issue a new ID. These pieces may include a birth certificate, school records, a shelter verification, divorce decree, marriage license, hospital admittance or release forms, Department of Human Services paperwork, a utility bill bearing the name of the client, or any official government issued document.

Many times a person, especially one who has been incarcerated for many years, needs to present the Secretary of State with an original, non-photocopied birth certificate. We have seen that obtaining this document can be extremely frustrating, time consuming and expensive. Many states, including Michigan, require a valid picture ID or other supporting documents in order to apply for a birth certificate. Michigan has begun to accept prison ID and accompanying release papers. However, we see many clients who are not aware of the importance of retaining these documents or the difficulties they are going to face upon release in obtaining their ID. The wait time for many states, when ordering a birth certificate, can be considerable. It can be six to eight weeks and in some cases even longer. Someone who is still incarcerated can wait this time but once released, six or eight weeks can be an extremely long time with no way to officially identify yourself or seek employment. Many clients we meet are eager to start work and become self-sufficient. They then become aware of the frustrations of obtaining an ID and become idle waiting for a birth certificate or other documents. Every effort to inform and assist inmates with the identification process before release will help to assure they are prepared to rejoin society immediately upon release.

Another barrier to identification is the cost. For instance, a Michigan birth certificate fee is \$26, or \$17 if, under certain circumstances, the certificate is available at Herman Keifer Hospital. Divorce decrees and marriage licenses are \$17. School records may cost up to \$3. A Michigan state identification cards costs \$10. If a person has none of these documents, the cost to replace them can be very prohibitive. If people were released with a trust-worthy prison ID that had information such as name on birth certificate and that allowed the secretary of state to verify their identity, they could hopefully avoid the barriers of waiting and the cost of replacing expensive documents before even having a chance to become employed or receive an income.

(E.) Benefits of Assistance

I feel the benefits of assistance with identification for those being released from prison will be significant to our state. In the National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices report, eighteen percent of those paroled will have their parole revoked and be returned to prison within just twelve months of release and forty-four percent will return to prison within two years. It says that the primary differences between the offenders who return to prison and the offenders who successfully complete their parole relate to their successful involvement in post-release services such as substance abuse treatment, physical and mental health services, job placement and vocational training, and educational programs. These programs, in addition to employers, banks, housing providers and government agencies, require proper identification.

Our state will be stronger and safer when those released from prison are supplied with tools to become successful instead of another negative statistic of crime and recidivism. Instead of being burdened with the high costs of incarceration, I want to see

Michigan support a strong and supportive prisoner re-entry program. I hope we can help our returning citizens come home empowered for their sakes and for the overall best interest of Michigan.

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to address you today.